

# Road to NIFC

In 1963, a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) fire program task force, responding to a request from the Bureau of the Budget, proposed that a BLM fire center be created, preferably in Boise, Idaho. By 1965, the BLM had established the Great Basin Fire Center in vacant Idaho National Guard buildings at Gowen Field. A joint Forest Service/BLM Fire Coordination Center was established in Forest Service space across from Julia Davis Park. At the same time, the Forest Service also wanted to establish an air center for forest fire suppression, and fire weather was recognized by both agencies as an important ingredient in fire suppression. These needs ultimately resulted in an agreement among BLM, Forest Service, and the Weather Bureau (now the National Weather Service) to construct the Boise Interagency Fire Center on land acquired by BLM through a land exchange with the state of Idaho. Because construction funding is included in its budget, BLM also owns the buildings and serves as the host agency.



In 1968, construction began on the administration building and warehouse. The three agencies moved into the building in May 1969. By that fall, a mess hall, west wing of a barracks, and smokejumper loft were also com-

pleted. Remaining major construction was completed in 1970.

At that time, the Forest Service operation was administered by the Boise National Forest and operated the Region 4 Western Zone Air Unit, the National Fire Radio Cache, and the Boise National Forest's Fire Control Branch, which included its dispatchers, smokejumpers, air tanker base, fire warehouse, air operations, and law enforcement. BLM's organization included the Divisions of Fire Management, Standards and Technology, Aircraft Management, Communications, and Administration, and its charge was to coordinate wildfire support for BLM nationally.

Different administrative levels and missions have created interesting challenges through the evolution of the Fire Center. For example, at one time, a yellow line in the warehouse separated the BLM's 5,000-person fire cache and the Forest Service's 2,000-person cache. The dispatch office included

three separate operations: the BLM's national fire support staff, the Boise National Forest dispatcher, and a Forest Service regional coordinator. By 1973, the Forest

Service operation was elevated organizationally to a national level after having been administered for a short time by Region 4. Ultimately, through the leadership of BLM-NIFC Director Jack Wilson and Forest Service Director Bob Bjornsen, a new era of cooperation and coordination evolved.

In 1973, the Department of the Interior established the Office of Aircraft Services, which was headquartered at the Fire Center. In January 1974, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, composed of the top fire managers of the federal and state wildland fire organizations, was formed. This ultimately had a strong effect on Fire Center operations. That same year, the agencies at BIFC were joined by the National Park Service; and in 1976, the Bureau of Indian Affairs became a permanent partner. In 1979, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officially joined as a partner, bringing the total number of agencies housed on base to seven. In early 1993 the Center's name was changed to "National Interagency Fire Center," or NIFC, to more accurately reflect its national mission. In 2002, a full-time representative of the National Association of State Foresters was established at NIFC, and in early 2003, a permanent representative of the Federal Emergency Management Administration joined the NIFC team.

Since the inception of NIFC, the partner agencies have effectively shared firefighting resources and associated costs. Today, through cooperative agreements, NIFC's highly successful interagency concept extends to all 50 States and Canada. NIFC also supports fires and other emergencies in foreign nations when requested by the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance of the U.S. Department of State.



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